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AGAM-P (M) (1 Feb 68) FOR OT RD-67X115

13 February 1968

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report - Operation HOPTAC XVI, 2d Brigade,  
 9th Infantry Division, Period 2-3 May 1967 (U)

TO: SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. Forwarded as inclosure is a report, subject as above.
2. Information contained in this report is provided to insure appropriate benefits in the future from Lessons Learned during current operations, and may be adapted for use in developing training material.

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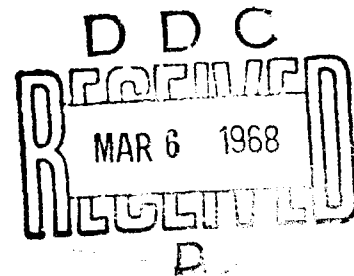
*Kenneth G. Wickham*

KENNETH G. WICKHAM  
 Major General, USA  
 The Adjutant General

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HEADQUARTERS  
2D BRIGADE, 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
APO San Francisco 96370

AVDE-BB-T

16 June 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation HOPTAC XVI (U)

THRU: Command Channels

TO: Commander  
U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam  
ATTN: J343  
APO San Francisco 96307

1. (U) Name of Operation: HOPTAC XVI, Search and Destroy.
2. (U) Date of Operation: 020730H May 67 to 031835H May 67.
3. (C) Location of Operation: Border area of KHLEM ICH and LONG DINH Districts of DINH TUONG Province, vicinity coordinates (UTM) XS 3152.
4. (C) Control Headquarters: 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, Dong Tam, Vietnam (XS 3143).
5. (C) Reporting Officer:
  - a. Over-all Command: COL William B. Fulton.
  - b. Subordinate Commanders:
    - (1) 3-47th Inf Bn: LTC Lucien E. Bolduc Jr.
    - (2) 3-60th Inf Bn: LTC Edwin W. Chamerlain Jr.
    - (3) 5-60th (M) Inf Bn: LTC Allen S. Flynn
    - (4) 3-34th Arty Bn: LTC Carrol S. Meek
6. (C) Task Organization:

3-47th Inf Bn

3-60th Inf Bn

Plat/D/15th Engr

Plat/D/15th Engr

DOWNGRADED AT 3 YR INTERVALS  
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SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report, Operation HOPTAC XVI (U)

Fire Support

3-34th Arty Gp  
3-34th Arty Bn (-)(DS)  
C/2-4th Arty Bn (-)  
Plat(-)(AW/SP) 2d Arty Bn  
Plat/3-60th Inf Bn  
8 M113/5-69th (M) Inf Bn

BDE CONTROL

HHC 2d Bde  
D/15th Engr Bn  
2/9th MP Co  
Dong Tam Base Elements  
Plat/3-47th Inf Bn

7. (C) Supporting Forces:

a. US Air Force: Eight (8) preplanned airstrikes were submitted and approved for this operation; four (4) strikes each day. On 2 May, after contact had been established, two (2) more strikes were requested on an immediate basis and approved. Preplanned requests went through Army channels by telephone in advance of the operation, and the immediate went via the Air Force single side-band comm system after approval by the local commander. The response in both cases was very good. All strikes were effective, but areas for joint improvement were noted. Ground units were slow several times to mark front line positions with smoke, thus delaying the strikes. The initial target description given by the requesting commander should be more detailed. Simply giving the FAC a set of coordinates does not provide the type of target he must locate at that location. Finally, the commander on the ground of the unit in contact is the individual best qualified to talk to the FAC and give adjustments to the bomb strikes when needed.

C-47 "Spooky" Flareships equipped with mini-guns were called in to support the operation on the night of 2 May. The reaction time of response to the call was good, and their support was very effective. As one ship ran low on fuel it was replaced by another. Mini-guns were expended only in one case.

b. Army Aviation: Although the general plan called for two (2) light airmobile lift companies initially to report to Dong Tam at 020700H, the night before only one (1) company was made available by higher headquarters for 020700H. The brigade plan was revised to utilize one company. However, at 020720H Division notified brigade that no airlift would be available. This forced two changes in the ground tactical plan. Two light airmobile companies were made available later in the day of 2 May and were employed in movement of small units, resupply and medical evacuation of casualties. These units were replaced late that night by a third lift company which remained with the brigade until late afternoon of 3 May. Reaction of all lift elements was speedy and efficient. A great deal of credit for the swift reaction of forces is due the 116th AVN Company (AML), nicknamed the "Hornets", stationed in Saigon. Their dedication to the efficient and continued support of this operation during the critical hours of contact was

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exemplary in every regard. Their actions earned them the respect and gratitude of all units involved. They did not hesitate to fly any mission at any time or under any condition as long as the combat commander deemed it necessary. Their support was total and completely unreserved. Four sorties of CH-47 lift were planned for 2 May and were used to haul in supplies and evacuate rice caches. On 3 May one sortie of CH-47 along with a light airmobile lift company, was employed as troop lift to extract attached Infantry company from the operation area (A Co, 3-47th Inf Bn).

c. US Navy: Navy support for the operation consisted of the use of ATC's and LCM-6 boats to transport elements of the brigade TOC CP North via the Canal Commercial to a field location in the ARVN command post compound at LONG DINH (XS 383494). The movement was smooth and uneventful. At the landing point, because of low tide, the wheeled vehicles had to be pulled off the boats using ARVN M113 Personnel Carriers and tow cable. The exposed mud flats prevented the vehicles from being driven off the boats under their own power. On 3 May the LCM-6 boats returned to the landing to pick up two M-42 tracked vehicles for transport back to Dong Tam. All water transport was on time and according to plan.

d. ARVN: ARVN supported by making available the 12th Regimental CP at Long Dinh, XS 38,494, for use as the location of the brigade TAC CP during the operation.

e. Artillery: Artillery supported the entire operation from a forward fire support base area located at XS 355495. Response to all fire missions was quick and efficient and was responsible for holding the enemy in place in many instances and materially reducing the amount of small arms fire he was able to bring upon friendly units. In the final assault against the enemy's main defensive position, a combination of mixed HE and smoke enabled the infantry and mechanized elements to assault successfully.

f. Intelligence: On or about 26 April 1967 the brigade received information from a PIOC (Province Intel Com) of the presence of two companies of the 514th Mobile Force VC Battalion in the Ap Bac II complex. Since this area was known to be a normal operating area for the VC, and one in which he felt reasonably secure, the report was considered reliable, probably true.

(C-3). Other local information tended also to back it up. During and after the operation elements of the 514th Battalion were, in fact, identified as the force in contact. Indications point to it having been elements of the Heavy Weapons Company (C-4) plus C-1 and C-2 Companies, 514th Battalion. Documents captured in the battle area are still being studied and may eventually reveal much about VC bases located in other parts of the province. The ground over which the battle took place was alternately rice paddy and thick jungle like patches of vegetation, with heavy foliage along the streams and canals. The weather for the entire operation was extremely good, hot with a little rain in widely scattered areas. An evaluation of the local populace

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by Brigade S5 indicated it to be independent to mild pro-VC.

8. (C) Mission: The brigade mission, as stated in its order, was to conduct an airmobile search and destroy operation in the AP BAC Secret Zone commencing at 020730H May 1967 to detect and destroy the 514th MF VC Battalion in cooperation with the 7th ARVN Division, during the period 2-4 May 1967. This mission was established by the brigade itself.

9. (C) Concept of Operation: As originally conceived, 3-60th Inf was to make an air-land assault northwest of Ap Bac II, via XS 279569, and work its way south through a series of objectives numbered one through ten, going into perimeter defense for the night at position X-Ray located XS 281495. 3-47th Inf was to execute an air-land assault as soon as the aircraft were released by 3-60th Inf, going into an LZ via XS 327518, and working north and west through a series of objectives numbered eleven through seventeen, and finally occupy a night perimeter position at Zulu, via XS 310576. The intent of this maneuver was to provide a cross-ruff against the enemy amounting to a four directional approach. One battalion force would move south, the other battalion force moving north. Any enemy moving away would conceivably move into the other approaching force. Similarly, any lateral movement by small enemy groups to either the east or west would also be moving into the path of an advancing battalion. It was intended that the 3-47th Inf would remain in position Zulu the next morning while 3-60th Inf would again execute an air-landed assault on an LZ via XS 350593 and subsequently move southwest to link up with 3-47th Inf at Zulu. This accomplished, both units were to turn generally southeast in specified zones and conduct search and clear operation along the Canal Commerciale to a point via XS 364631, at which point the operation would terminate and all elements be extracted to Dong Tam base.

10. (C) Execution: (See sketch map attached) The order for Operation HOPTAC XVI was issued at 301730 April 1967. Brigade was informed early on the evening of 1 May that the operation as planned would not be available. Only one company was made available, plans were therefore changed which instructed both 3-47th Inf and 3-60th Inf Battalions to prepare to move out by motor convoy. A Company, 3-60th Inf was kept at Dong Tam to be air lifted into the LZ of the 3-60th Inf. 3-34th Arty Group was the first unit to move, departing by convoy via routes TL25, LT 16A, and OL4 to the Fire Support Base area via XS 347495 at 020500H. 3-60th Inf(-) moved next via the same route at 02-0530H to a position via XS 290499. Units were placed on line facing north, B/3-60th Inf on the right and C/3-60th Inf on the left, along the LD, highway #4. This represented a major change in the direction of attack with both battalions attacking north along a northern parallel axis of advance pushing against the block established in the north by A Company, 3-60th Inf.

Twenty minutes after its scheduled departure time for the airlift of A Company, 3-60th Inf, the Brigade received notification that there would be no airmobile company available. A quick consultation between the battalion and

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A/3-47th came under heavy automatic weapons immediately after emerging from a woodline vic XS 311519, taking 7-12 casualties from the first bursts of fire from the vicinity of objective thirteen. The unit deployed and attempted to move against the enemy position, but was hampered by the heavy undergrowth which made it difficult to see the location of the enemy firing positions.

Heavy automatic fire from the enemy bunker line prevented A/3-47th Inf from maneuvering against the position. The first fire was received at a distance of seventy-five yards. A/3-47th Inf continued to try to improve its position, at the same time calling in artillery fire, gunships and three airstrikes on the enemy positions to their front. These airstrikes and artillery fires, were brought in as close as one hundred and fifty meters.

At about 1300, B/3-60th Inf, then located on objective six was placed under operational control of A/3-47th Inf and directed to move east to objective fifteen to establish a blocking position on the north, oriented to the south. At the same time A/3-60th Inf and C/5-60th Inf were ordered east to occupy objectives nine and eight respectively to close off enemy escape routes on that flank. C/3-47th Inf and B/3-47th Inf were ordered to be in movement northwest to vic LZ K (XS 324527) to block on the east flank of the position A/3-47th Inf. About two hours were utilized to get all units notified, moved into assaulting positions, resupplied with ammunition before a coordinated final assault upon the enemy bunker line could be made.

C/5-60th Inf, a mechanized company moved through inundated areas which had heretofore been felt to be impassable. By patient and skillful selection of routes they were able to get into the requisite assault positions. C/5-60th and A/3-60th Inf made the final assault from the west from a line running north and south about 1000 meters east of objective eight and nine, into the enemy position located in the turn of the creek between objectives thirteen and fourteen. A/3-47th Inf assisted this assault by fire until its fires were masked by the assaulting troops, at which it picked up and joined the attack on the south flank. C/5-60th Inf greatly enhanced the firepower of the assault by employing its full-tracked armored carriers in the assault line with .30 and .50 cal machine guns firing point-blank into the bunkers all along the line. The organic infantry followed closely on foot. The enemy was stunned by the steady and vicious assault, but continued to resist with heavy rifle and automatic weapons fire. 1st Platoon, A/3-60th Inf on the right flank of the assault move across the ground where A/3-47th's initial casualties still lay, and resupplying themselves with ammunition from these bodies, charged into the southern line of bunkers, attacking it enfilade from west to east and initiating the final break in the enemy position. Seeing their line thus broken, many VC came up out of their position and tried to flee to the east, but were cut down as both C/5-60th and A/3-60th Inf conducted their final assault into the bunker line. The VC were annihilated in position and the objective secured by 1500 hours.

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brigade commander resulted in a decision to truck the units to the AO a move requiring approximately two hours by road.

At the same time, 3-60th Inf was moving into position, the brigade forward CP elements were moving north by ATC's on the Canal Commercial to set up at the 12th ARVN Regimental CP compound located at Long Dinh, XS 383494. 3-60th Inf's convoy was followed by 3-47th Inf Battalion on the same route at 020600H, moving to off load its combat elements vic XS 340502 in order from left to right; A Company, C Company, and B Company all facing to the north along highway #4.

The artillery and air preparation to LZ Alfa, XS 281569 went according to plan even though the airmobile assault had to be cancelled because of lack of lift aircraft. This was done with a view of deceiving the enemy as of the true intent of the two Battalions. An airstrike was brought in at 0730, followed at 0750 by artillery. Later analysis indicated that this obvious activity possibly deceived the enemy into believing the main effort would come less than 2000 meters to their south. It accounts for the fact that solid contact was gained and maintained in an area where previously the VC had always chosen to refuse combat if possible.

At approximately 0830 both battalions had moved across the LD vic route #4 and were moving north to their initial objectives. Those objectives were: B/3-60th Inf to objectives nine (XS 298520) and eight (XS 299533), C/5-60th Inf objectives Joker (XS 276516), King (XS 277528), and Queen (XS 279537), A/3-47th Inf to objective thirteen (XS 310520), C/3-47 Inf to objective twelve (XS 322522), and B/3-47th Inf to objective eleven (XS 333522). Elements of 3-60 Inf met no resistance at all as they moved north, picking up only an occasional detainee suspect. By 1215, C/5-60 Inf moving on APC's had cleared objectives Joker and ten, and had moved north to clear and occupy seven (XS 291535). A/3-60 Inf, originally scheduled for airlift was finally committed to follow the action at 1010 and had moved to objective ten. B/3-60 Inf had cleared objective nine, as planned, and was in position about 700 meters to the west of it at this time, preparing to move north to objective eight (XS 299528). Units of 3-47 Inf had moved forward very cautiously during this period, covering about 1500-1800 meters each, and were reporting light sniper fire and some visual observation of retreating VC as they approached their assigned objectives from the south. A second airstrike keyed to the original plan had been expended at 1100 hours on a suspected VC target vic XS 315547. B/3-47 Inf found a cache of five tons of rice and had evacuated it by air to Dong Tam. At approximately 1250 hours both A and B companies, 3-47th Inf, reported contact with the enemy. B/3-47 Inf, which had moved slightly northeast on a route of march would have taken it past the east end of objective eleven by some 1200 meters, had turned and was approaching objective eleven from the east. It received automatic weapons fire from objective eleven while still some 300-500 meters to the east. C Company continued to move slowly west toward objective twelve.

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The units of 3-60th Inf pulled into a perimeter for the night, vic XS 307524, while 3-47th Inf coiled up in the positions they had occupied at the time of the last assault at 1810 hours. Because the original plan of bringing the 3-60th Inf into base X-Ray was not feasible, the Brigade Commander had visited the Battalion Commander 3-60th Inf approximately 1600 and suggested that the Bn CP and supporting units move to the brigade fire support base for better security. The battalion commander felt he was in a defensive posture which could hold an attack. In view of this, the Brigade Commander ordered eight APC's of the 5-60th Inf (M) Bn from Dong Tam base to proceed immediately to Base X-Ray as an added security element. Additionally, four APC's from the brigade fire support base were ordered to proceed to base X-Ray to insure its support.

At 1900 hours the CP, 3-60th Inf vic XS 281495 reported being under attack from the south and southwest by a force unknown size receiving 57 RR, 60mm mortar, and small arms fire. Defensive fires initiated. Shortly after this attack was initiated four full-tracked armored carriers from the brigade fire support base mounting .50 cal machine guns arrived and helped to break up this attack. Upon receiving a B-2 intelligence report that a VC battalion was moving east some 2000 meters from Base X-Ray, requested a reinforcing unit from division and was provided with A/3-7th Inf which arrived in the 3-60th Inf CP area by air approximately 2200 hours. This unit acted as an additional security element throughout the night and was extracted back to its parent unit (199th Brigade) the next morning once the threat had passed.

On the morning of 3 May, 3-60th Inf and 3-47th Inf conducted sweeps of the battle area for weapons, bodies, and intelligence, six additional VC were killed as a result of these sweeps. At 0945, B/3-47th Inf reported small arms fire from the southeast of its position on the east side of LZ K. A/3-60th Inf and B/3-60th Inf were airlifted into LZ Paul and LZ Zeke (XS 340530) and (XS 335513) respectively and commenced a sweep to the south at about 1200 hours. No contact with any VC was made, and at approximately 1300 hours the order for all units to execute extraction to Dong Tam was issued. All units closed Dong Tam by 1800 hours 3 May 1967.

11. (C) Results:	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>Equip Captured</u>
a. Friendly:	15	46	2- .30 cal MG water cooled 1- .30 cal MG (1919A4) 1- M60 MG 2- SMG Thompson 4- 60mm mortars 1- BAR 1- Rifle, US M-1 8- Carbines 1- SMG, AK-47 1- 57mm RR 1- Soviet Flag & field gear.

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b. Enemy: KIA POW Detainees

195 (BC) 2 40  
40 Poss

c. Search of airstrikes target areas:

SEARCHED

XS 315523

NOT SEARCHED

XS 315547  
XS 282568  
XS 333557  
XS 335568  
XS 353555  
XS 355565

12. (U) Administrative matters: None.

13. (U) Special Equipment and Techniques: None

14. (U) Commander's Analysis:

a. The general scheme of maneuver contained in the Brigade operation order must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate changes in a failure to get required airlift or riverine lift, as the case may be. In this instance, two changes to the operations plan had to be made in short notice for lack of previously allocated airmobile companies.

b. In developing operational plans, tactical control measures must provide for maximum flexibility in controlling the maneuver of units. If the original plan cannot be executed, there must be sufficient latitude to redirect the effort of the participating units according to the control measures previously issued. Check points, a series of intermediate objectives and an area grid system provide the maximum options for redirection of units and shifting of boundaries. Control measures must provide for rapid adjustment of boundaries, shifting of fire coordination lines and changes in the scheme of maneuver. Based on the situation, control of maneuver companies can be shifted between battalions to facilitate the scheme of maneuver once contact is made.

c. When any unit, particularly in the Delta area, develops a contact, commanders at each echelon must be quick to react to determine the type of fire, the direction of fire and the general location from which the fire is coming. Often this will indicate the size of the unit, the base, and its general defensive posture. If there is a hesitation or a pause to clarify the situation prior to building upon any contact, the enemy can easily slip

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through the many waterways and dense vegetation in the area and escape. Blocks must be rapidly established and other units in the immediate vicinity must change the direction of their movement and respond to the contact accordingly.

d. The Ap Bac Battle was a classic in finding, fixing, fighting, and finishing the enemy. Through the use of simple control measures, units of the two battalions were moved into blocking positions to cut off routes of withdrawal while other units were maneuvered within a short period of time on the flank and into assaulting positions. The units which made initial contact provided a base of fire. When this maneuver was combined with the use of both air and artillery supporting fires, the enemy situation was quickly developed to the point that he had to remain in his positions or perish in any attempt to withdraw.

e. Units must be prepared to bring in artillery and air as close as possible to the front lines. In this engagement, colored smoke and the use of panels was used in direct contact. The battalion commanders positioned themselves immediately over their units in an observation helicopter. This resulted in the ability to bring fire in close support to their units. Air strikes were brought in as close as 150 meters without friendly casualties. Similarly, artillery fires were controlled without undue delay.

f. Infantry units, once having found the enemy, must be prepared through fire and maneuver to conduct a coordinated assault against the enemy positions. By the use of close supporting artillery fire and shock action, the infantry units were in a position to launch a coordinated, vicious attack which finally overcame the enemy who were in developed defensive position.

g. In the Delta area, where VC have been used to fighting ARVN, it has been customary to break off contact at around 1600 hours. In this instance, it was determined by the brigade commander that contact would be maintained until the assault could be conducted successfully. No regard was given to normal night re-supply, to developing night defensive positions until a complete over-running of the enemy's position could be executed regardless of the time of night. The point to be made is that friendly forces should continue to close on the enemy once contact is established regardless of the hour.

h. When making an assault in the Delta, where there is very little cover, units which are in line of friendly fire must take cover. Fire coordination could become difficult. In this instance, one battalion attacked directly into the VC and their line of fire was into the other battalion. A simple order of to take cover was all that was required to insure that maximum assault fire was delivered against the enemy positions by the maneuvering battalion.

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1. Mechanized infantry was used most successfully in this instance. There was a willingness by the unit commander to continue to search for routes through very swampy and marshy areas. He patiently maneuvered his armored personnel carriers up to an assaulting line and deployed them along a paddy while receiving some recoilless rocket and mortar fire. Once having deployed his APC's he dismounted his infantry and through the combined use of the 30 caliber and the 50 caliber machineguns, along with M-79 and the Mark 48 grenade launchers, he moved forward with great speed and with shock action. The volume of fire developed by the armor personnel carriers directly into the bunker line, coupled with a mixture of HE and WP artillery, enabled the moving infantry to continue and close the gap between their initial assault positions and the line of enemy bunkers and defensive foxholes. In this instance it was a clear demonstration that once fire superiority had been established, the assault was able to execute with few casualties simply because the enemy was required to be in holes until the friendly infantry was completely on top of him.

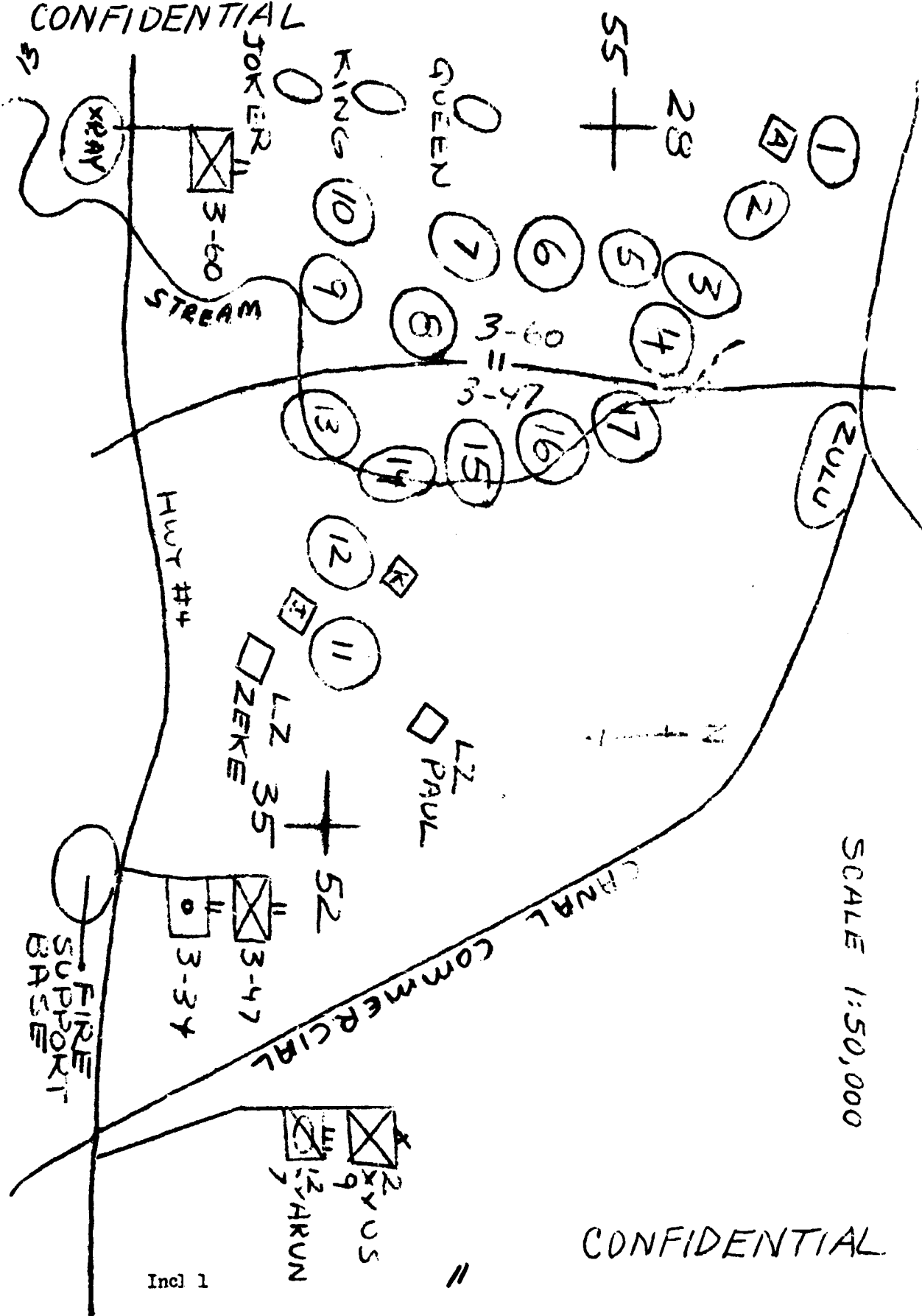
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sketch

/S/WILLIAM B. FULTON  
WILLIAM B. FULTON  
Colonel, Infantry  
Commanding

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(Security classification of title, body of abstract and indexing annotation must be entered when the overall report is classified)

1. ORIGINATING ACTIVITY (Corporate author)		2a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION	
OACSFOR, DA, Washington, D. C. 20310		Confidential	
		2b. GROUP	
		4	
3. REPORT TITLE			
Combat After Action Report-Operation HOPTAC XVI, 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Div.			
4. DESCRIPTIVE NOTES (Type of report and inclusive dates)			
Experiences of unit engaged in counterinsurgency operations, 2-3 May 1967			
5. AUTHOR(S) (First name, middle initial, last name)			
CO, 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division			
6. REPORT DATE		7a. TOTAL NO. OF PAGES	7b. NO. OF REFS
16 June 1967		12	
8a. CONTRACT OR GRANT NO.		8b. ORIGINATOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
a. PROJECT NO.		67X115	
c. N/A		9b. OTHER REPORT NO(S) (Any other numbers that may be assigned this report)	
d.			
10. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT			
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		12. SPONSORING MILITARY ACTIVITY	
N/A		OACSFOR, DA, Washington, D. C. 20310	
13. ABSTRACT			

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DD FORM 1 NOV 63 1473

UNCLASSIFIED